

Recommendations for the

Presentation of theses and dissertations

Committees responsible for this British Standard

The preparation of this British Standard was entrusted by the Information and Documentation Standard Policy Committee (DOT/-) to Technical Committee DOT/6, upon which the following bodies were represented:

- British Library Research and Development Department
- British Psychological Society
- Chartered Society of Designers
- Department of Trade and Industry Management Services and Manpower Division (Msm)
- Her Majesty’s Stationery Office
- Institute of Information Scientists
- Institute of Journalists
- Institute of Linguists
- Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
- Library Association
- London College of Printing
- National Centre for Information Media and Technology (Cimtech)
- Periodical Publishers’ Association
- Publishers’ Association
- Science Museum Library
- Standing Conference of National and University Libraries

The following bodies were also represented in the drafting of the standard, through subcommittees and panels:

- Aslib
- British Library Document Supply Centre
- Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom
- Council for National Academic Awards
- Council of Polytechnic Librarians
- University of Glasgow
- University of Reading

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Foreword

This revision of BS 4821 has been prepared under the direction of the Information and Documentation Standards Policy Committee. It supersedes BS 4821:1972, which is withdrawn.

Since the first edition of BS 4821 was published in 1972, there have been changes in methods of producing and using theses that make a revision of the standard necessary.

Computers with text-processing software (word processors) are now replacing typewriters and are widely used by people who know little of the conventions of typing or printing. Theses, or parts of theses, are often submitted in forms other than the traditional text on paper, e.g. video recordings and certain kinds of computer printout. It is also becoming more important to submit theses in a form suitable for microfilming, as microform copies are generally what is supplied to readers in this and other countries.

It is hoped that authors of theses may find the standard useful in the advice it gives about details of presentation. It should help them to avoid some of the pitfalls, but it cannot cater for every eventuality and leaves certain things to common sense.

It is also hoped that these recommendations will help authorities concerned with establishing regulations for the presentation of theses, particularly those that are drawing up regulations for the first time. It is not intended to inhibit in any way the freedom of authorities in making regulations appropriate to their needs.

By way of example, the text of this British Standard is produced as printout from a computer with text-processing software.

A British Standard does not purport to include all the necessary provisions of a contract. Users of British Standards are responsible for their correct application.

Compliance with a British Standard does not of itself confer immunity from legal obligations.

Summary of pages

This document comprises a front cover, an inside front cover, pages i and ii, pages 1 to 12, an inside back cover and a back cover.

This standard has been updated (see copyright date) and may have had amendments incorporated. This will be indicated in the amendment table on the inside front cover.

1 Scope

This British Standard provides recommendations for the presentation of theses, dissertations and similar documents. It includes advice on paper quality, design, sequence of material, methods of producing text, quality of typeface and also on the treatment of material that is in a form not suitable for binding.

NOTE The titles of the publications referred to in this standard are listed on the inside back cover.

2 Definitions

For the purposes of this British Standard the following definitions apply.

2.1

bibliographical reference

a set of data describing a document or part of a document, sufficiently precise and detailed to identify it and to enable it to be located

NOTE In this context the term “document” applies to all the different kinds of work that may be cited, including books, periodicals, articles, maps, computer software and databases, music, recorded sound, prints, photographs and moving images.

2.2

illustration

line drawing, graph, diagram, photograph or map produced on paper or accompanying microform, video tape or compact disk

2.3

location key

symbol used to link a statement in the text to its corresponding note

2.4

note

an extension of the text, in a footnote or endnote, that elucidates a point in greater detail than the main text or that, if included in the text, would otherwise interrupt its flow

2.5

recto

the right-hand page of an open book

2.6

thesis

a statement of investigation or research, presenting the author’s findings and any conclusions reached, submitted in support of the author’s candidature for a higher degree, professional qualification or other award

NOTE Throughout this standard, the term “thesis” applies also to dissertations and similar documents.

2.7

verso

the left-hand page of an open book

3 General

3.1 Use of theses

Authors should bear in mind that theses are read, stored and copied, and should be designed and produced for such use. It is in authors’ own interests to ensure that those who first read their theses can do so with ease. Thereafter, it is largely a matter of courtesy, both to unknown readers and to those who store theses and make them available to readers, to ensure that they are in a form that can be handled with ease. The institution to which the thesis is submitted should be able to advise about requirements for permission to copy.

3.2 Length

The author should bear in mind that a thesis is more likely to suffer from being too bulky than from being too slim. Its length will depend on the subject and on the regulations of the authority to which it will be submitted.

3.3 Archival properties

Some of the non-book materials that form part of a thesis, e.g. photographs and magnetic tape, may deteriorate rapidly if they are not of archival quality or are stored in unsuitable conditions.

Pressure-sensitive adhesive tape (self-adhesive tape) should not be used on any material that forms part of a thesis, because of the damaging properties of the adhesives. If authors are in doubt about the archival properties of materials, including ink and adhesives, used in the production of their theses, they should consult specialists.

3.4 Conventions

It is essential that the presentation of a thesis follows the conventions of its particular discipline. For example, the rules for use of italic, bold and initial capitals may vary from one discipline to another. Italic, script and fancy typefaces should not be used merely for decorative effect. Displayed quotations should not be set in italic, nor should capital letters be used for long passages. Unusually wide line spacing, e.g. triple spacing in typescript, should be avoided.

NOTE For further information about typographic conventions see the bibliography.

4 Text and illustrative material on paper

4.1 Quality of reproduction

More than one copy of the thesis will be required. All copies should be legible and at least one should be of a quality suitable for microfilming, and therefore should follow the recommendations in 4.2 to 4.6 and 7.1.

NOTE 1 For further information about the quality required for microfilming see BS 5444.

NOTE 2 Any pages larger than A4 are likely to be reduced to A4 when the thesis is copied and reduction may impair legibility.

4.2 Colour

If the use of colour is essential in the text or illustrations of a thesis, the author should choose a method of production that facilitates the reproduction of colour. Because copies for consultation are generally issued on microfilm, any page that contains colour should be headed "Original in colour", so that the reader will be aware that some information may have been lost in copying. In the production of graphs, maps and diagrams, hatching or broken lines, which will reproduce in monochrome, should be considered as an alternative to colour or used in addition to it.

4.3 Methods of text production

Whatever the form of the final version of the thesis, which may be typescript, printout or typeset, the text should be of the quality recommended in clause 7. In addition, the author should check in advance that the system is capable of producing any special symbols, smaller letter sizes for notes (see 13.2), etc. required. If the system cannot produce a particular symbol, it may be added by hand in black ink (see 3.3).

4.4 Format

The text and, wherever possible, all the material of the thesis including illustrations, should be produced on A4-size paper. If in exceptional circumstances another format is required for the whole thesis, the author should seek permission to use a non-A4-size format from the examining body.

NOTE 1 A4-size paper is specified in BS 4000.

NOTE 2 If a format larger than A4 is used, the production of microfiche copies and full-size enlargements may not be feasible.

4.5 Paper

Paper used for the text should be of a substance within the range 70 g/m² to 100 g/m². It should be white or of a colour that gives good contrast with the text, so that it is easy to read and reproduce.

4.6 Production of text

To avoid risk of show-through, text should be produced either:

- a) entirely on rectos;
- b) mostly on rectos; but occasionally on versos, e.g. to allow a diagram to face related text; or
- c) on paper that is opaque enough to avoid show-through, in which case text may be produced on both sides of the paper.

The thesis should be divided into appropriate units such as chapters, sections and subsections. There should be some visual indication of the beginning of a chapter. Every chapter should begin on a new page, either a recto or on the page immediately following the last page of the previous chapter, whether it is a verso or recto.

4.7 Photographic prints and computer printout

Photographic prints should, if bound with the text, be on medium-weight photographic paper (e.g. paper of a thickness equivalent to that of uncoated paper of substance within the range 70 g/m² to 100 g/m²) or permanently mounted on A4-size card or substantial paper. Computer printout should be burst and coarse perforations trimmed before binding; it should be on paper of substance not less than 70 g/m².

4.8 Large illustrations

If it is necessary to bind in an illustration on a paper size larger than A4, it should be produced on paper that can be folded to fit within the thesis (see Figure 1). If possible, such an illustration should be mounted on an A4-size guard, so that the whole illustration is visible when it is unfolded and the volume is closed. If an illustration is too large for such treatment, it should either be bound so that part of it is concealed when the volume is closed, although that will make it less convenient to consult, or it should be folded and stored in a pocket attached to the inside back cover of the volume. The binder should be asked to advise if there are likely to be several large illustrations, as they add to the difficulties of binding.